

**STATEMENT
OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM - SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY, AND HUMAN RESOURCES
REGARDING
U.S. AND ALLIED COUNTERDRUG OPERATIONS IN THE TRANSIT ZONE
OPERATIONS – CAN WE SUSTAIN RECORD SEIZURES WITH DECLINING
RESOURCES**

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Good morning, chairman Souder, ranking member Cummings, and members of the subcommittee. It is my pleasure to be with you today to discuss the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) work on counternarcotic operations in the Transit Zone. This issue is of enormous importance, and CBP, in conjunction with our interagency colleagues and the law enforcement agencies and military forces of other nations, is proud to work in support of counter-narcotic programs to confront the transnational threat and to reduce the amount of drug smuggling that occurs across U.S. borders. CBP protects the Nation's borders and the American people from these smuggling activities. Among the many tools we use is an integrated, coordinated, and highly trained air and marine interdiction force.

Central American countries and their maritime borders, as well as large sections of the Caribbean and Pacific Ocean, are the primary corridors through which illicit drug-producing organizations in South American countries and United States consumers connect. With complex topography and central geography, those nations provide a natural channel for drug trafficking organizations and they will remain the primary Transit Zone for illicit drugs bound for the United States for the foreseeable future.

Battling the transnational drug threat is a primary activity for CBP. CBP core competencies are applicable to any illegal attempt to violate U.S. borders. CBP resources used in counter-drug related activities support our efforts to secure the borders and complement transnational threat interdiction.

Our counternarcotic missions include detection, and monitoring as well as tracking, interception and interdiction of illegal conveyances. Primarily using sensed aircraft and information from

intelligence, investigations, and ground-based sensors, our air interdiction agents are able to monitor areas of mountainous terrain, thick jungles, and oceans, which are difficult to monitor with only ground- or marine-based assets. CBP marine interdiction agents are often directed from airborne platforms for maritime interdiction operations along the coastal waterways of the United States, Puerto Rico, and the common waterways of the United States and Canada.

Interagency cocaine seizures and disruptions have increased 124 percent, from 103 metric tons in 2000 to 231 metric tons in 2005. Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) South has attributed this increase to the improvement in cooperation among U.S. agencies and bordering nations, better intelligence, and the ability to stop go-fast boat efforts with the introduction of armed helicopters. Under the coordination of JIATF South, multiple forces have combined to seize and disrupt a record amount of cocaine for the last three calendar years. CBP remains a significant partner with JIATF South and the interagency community. CBP aircraft provide over 50 percent of JIATF South's maritime patrol aircraft flight hours. In 2005, CBP P-3 aircraft contributed to the interdiction of 211,000 pounds of uncut cocaine. Using standard drug values, that equals \$235,433 worth of drugs interdicted for every P-3 flight hour that is flown in support of JIATF South.

Despite drastic improvements that are evidenced by these numbers, "known and actionable" maritime illicit drug movements in the western Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean remain due to challenges such as budget constraints and other homeland security priorities, such as disaster response, that take precedence over this mission. Such issues leave the long-term nature of Transit Zone interdiction activities in a state of flux. It is also important to note that Transit Zone traffickers continue to modify their strategies as our coordinated efforts improve. We must remain agile and continue to strengthen our interagency and international relationships and employ new strategies to have a continued impact on the drug market.

CBP is committed to continuing to support the efforts in the Transit Zone. As the primary agency responsible for protecting our borders, we will continue to employ our assets to fight the flow of illegal drugs across American borders. Interdicting transnational threats far from our borders contributes to border security and is part of CBP's "extending the borders" strategy. We are deeply committed to working with the Congress, our military, other law enforcement agencies, and our international partners to keep illicit drugs out of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.